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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000248

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TAGS: PTER PINS PGOV PNAT PHUM KJUS KISL ASEC ID
SUBJECT: GOI GAINING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR POSO ACTIONS

REF: A. JAKARTA 152
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Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER STANLEY HARSHA FOR REASONS REASONS 1.4
(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. Over the past several days the GOI has done better in publicly justifying its January 22 actions against armed militants in Poso and in gaining the support of some national Muslim leaders in bringing calm to the situation. In particular, Vice President Jusuf Kalla met with Muslim leaders January 27, firmly defending GOI law enforcement actions and asking the leaders to actively help to calm the situation in Poso. Media coverage over the past few days in the mainstream press has portrayed the criminal or terrorist nature of the militant holdout targeted by police and its anti-terrorist Detachment 88, with at least one major newspaper endorsing the action. While tensions in Poso remain high and the danger of retaliation by extremists persists, the GOI appears to have taken the initiative away from the militants. The initial sketchy public relations response by police demonstrates the need for continued U.S. support to build up police community engagement capabilities.
End Summary.

Vice President Appeals to Muslim Leaders

12. (C) Vice President Jusuf Kalla convened a large representation of national Islamic leaders at his home January 27 to defend the January 22 strike against armed militants in Poso and to garner support for reducing tensions. According to media reports, Kalla told the gathering, "The government has tried hard to be just without favoring any party." As broker of the 2001 Malino peace declaration that had brought an uneasy peace to Central Sulawesi, Kalla was probably the most credible government official to deal with this issue. As one excellent contact told us, "The Kalla meeting was very good, very quick, and got the right message out." In his meeting, Kalla referred to the second point of the Malino declaration which calls for support for all law enforcement operations, and to point three that authorities must be just in maintaining security.

13. Muslim leaders attending the meeting included: deputy chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Rozy Munir, former Muhammadiyah Chairman Ahmad Syafii Maarif, Prosperous Justice Party President Tifatul Sembiring, Crescent Party Chairman and Forestry Minister MS K'ban, Indonesian Ulama Council Chairman Ahmad Midan, Jakarta's State Islamic University Rector Komarudin Hidayat, and former Laskar Jihad leader, Ja'far Umar Thalib, in addition to Ministers, the Speaker of Parliament, and senior military and police officials.

Moderate Muslim Support Will Be Key

¶4. (C) A few Muslim leaders have already begun exerting a moderating influence. "The Indonesian Ulamas Council (MUI) will gather Islamic organizations and ulamas in Central Sulawesi to find the best solution to settle the riot in Poso," NU Political Director and MUI leader Amidhan told the media. He said the government has promised to build a pesantren in Poso and that MUI would form a national committee for Poso rehabilitation consisting of government and civic leaders from the Christian and Muslim communities. Also, NU Chairman Hasyim Muzadi met with Poso Muslim leaders in Jakarta January 27, pledging to play a mediating role, the press reported.

¶5. (C) In a more cynical light, Chairman of the Poso Forum of Muslims Struggle for Friendship (FSPUI) Adnan Arsal reportedly asked the 16 Poso fugitives on the police's most wanted list to surrender immediately in order to prevent more clashes with police and civilian victims. Adnan Arsal, who participated in the 2001 Malino Accords, is widely suspected by the INP to head the local Anak Tanah Runtuh (ATR) extremist group and support many of the terrorists in this conflict area. INP investigators told us in December that they were investigating Arsal, but added that he was highly skilled at concealing his direct involvement.

¶6. (SBU) While USDOJ and international NGO police training have human rights and community relations components, police here traditionally lack media savvy; militants had been winning the public relations war in the immediate aftermath

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of the attack, with the media focusing on civilian casualties and claims that the police used excessive force (ref B). Hardliners' accusations that the raid constituted a government attack against Muslims initially got widespread publicity. Journalists tell us that radical organizations were effective in pressuring some media to put their spin on the story.

Government Launches PR Offensive

¶7. (C) However, the public diplomacy battle has begun to shift in the government's favor. Following the same type of proactive approach used after the killing of the terrorist Azahari in a November 2005 police raid, the government has launched an effective public diplomacy counter-attack with media briefings and meetings with community leaders. A counter-terrorism police investigator in Poso confirmed that the deputy police chief had instructed the national police (INP) public relations unit to launch a campaign to explain the raid to the media. During the past few days, the mainstream media has been widely reporting all sides of the issue, reporting in-depth about the militant nature of Poso's Gebang Rejo stronghold and the large amounts of arms discovered.

¶8. (C) Leading investigative daily "Koran Tempo" published a full front page story January 27, "Poso Jemaah Islamiyah Base," laying out the alleged JI connection in detail with a map showing arms links from Mindanao, Ambon, Kalimantan and Java to Poso. The article quotes former JI leader Nasir Abas as confirming the connection. (Note: Abas works closely with the INP on Central Sulawesi investigations, and as of January 29 was with the INP in Poso.) "Media Indonesia," with a high Muslim readership, commented January 28 on the front page that the police action was necessary to restore order, adding, "There is no other supremacy but legal supremacy. Therefore, the police must continue to push for peace and to be responsible in carrying out their task." Even the conservative Islamic daily "Republika" on January 29

"welcomed" Kalla's actions "inviting Islamic leaders to have a dialogue about violence in Poso."

¶ 9. (C) The Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) in Central Sulawesi on January 25 filed a complaint against police for excessive use of force resulting in innocent casualties, the media reported. Komnas HAM Chair Abdul Hakim Garuda Nusantara, when asked about the case, confirmed to us that their office in Poso had sent a written complaint to police and that Komnas HAM would be investigating on the basis that innocent people might have been victims. We urged that this human rights NGO take a balanced approach, at least acknowledging that the police have targeted criminals and terrorists. (Note. The police counter-terrorism investigator in Poso told us that four police officers involved in the Poso raid have been detained, presumably for alleged improper conduct in the operation.)

¶ 10. (C) International Crisis Group's Sidney Jones told us that while signals at the national level are now better, her sources say the situation in Poso remains tense with deep anger against police. Besides actions by moderating Islamic groups to cool down emotions, she said it will be important for the GOI to explain what is being done to solve cases of Christians killing Muslims that occurred in 2000 at Walisongo Pesantren and in 2001 at Buyung Katedo. She also is hearing reports that some radical elements in different parts of the country are talking about targeting police.

¶ 11. Comment: DOJ/ICITAP has provided extensive training to (INP), including police in Poso, on civil disorder management and human rights. The ICITAP mid-level management program has stressed the human rights component and as a requisite to building better relations with the community. However, because of limited funding, we are able to reach only a fraction of the police force. We need to continue U.S. support to build up police community engagement capabilities.

End Comment.

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